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DEVELOPMENT OF UKRAINIAN-CROATIAN RELATIONS AFTER 1991

Ukrainians and Croats have many similarities in their languages (both are Slavic), culture and history. During the last few years, Croatia becomes a more and more popular country in Ukraine. Croatian experience of the struggle for independence in the 1990s is useful and highly interesting for today's Ukrainians. Further active cooperation and partnership between Ukraine and Croatia can be very productive and useful for both sides. So, in this article, I analyze the development of relations between Ukraine and the Republic of Croatia, as sovereign countries, from 1991, when these states became independent, until today. This article considers such questions as bilateral relations in politics, economy, culture, and sport. The history of Ukrainian-Croatian relations is shown chronologically and topically. Special attention is paid to the process of bilateral diplomatic recognition of both countries at the end of 1991 and to the period after 2014.

Keywords: Croatia, Ukraine, international relationship, diplomacy.

The Republic of Croatia is a very popular touristic destination for Ukrainians at all. However, a history, language and culture of this country is weakly known in Ukraine, despite of the fact that our cultures are quite similar. Indeed, connections between these two countries have a deep history. Many Ukrainian and Croatian historians consider that Slavic tribes of White Croats arrived to Balkans exactly from nowadays Western Ukraine (Carpathian region) in the 7th century. There are even some archeological evidences, that decently prove this theory¹.

Both Ukrainians and Croats for centuries hadn't own states and were divided between other empires (Ukrainians – between Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Austria and Russian, Croats – between Austria and Ottoman Empire). Furthermore, from 1772 to 1918 Western Ukrainians and Croats were living in one country – Habsburg Empire (from 1867 – Austrian-Hungarian Empire). Because of some inner migrations in that period, even today Ruthenian (the old name for Carpathian Ukrainians) and Ukrainian national minority exists in Slavonia (Eastern Croatia)².

After World War II both Croatia and Ukraine weren't independent states. Croatia was one of the subjects of socialist Yugoslavia (Socialistic Republic of Croatia) and Ukraine (Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic) was a part of Soviet Union. However, a communist regime in Tito's Yugoslavia was in fact much "softer" than in USSR. According to constitutions of both communist federations (SFRY and USSR) every republic has a right of peaceful secession³. But it was, obviously, easier in theory than on practice.

In the end of 1991 because of a collapse of the communist system and the end of the Cold War both Ukraine and Croatia became independent states. When Ukraine got the independence peacefully and without significant troubles, the way of Croatia towards its independence was pawed by a full-scaled war against Yugoslav army and Serbian rebels that started in 1991 and ended only in 4 years – in 1995. Croatia has won that troublesome conflict.

It's very important that Ukraine, actually, was the first state-member of the United Nations, who diplomatically recognised the Republic of Croatia. It happened on December 11th, 1991⁴. On the other hand, Croatia also was the first country that recognized the independence of Ukraine – Croatian parliament (Sabor) did it on December 5th, 1991. In January 1992 the majority of Western countries recognized the independent Croatia and this state became a member of the Organisation of United Nations on May 22th, 1992⁵.

¹ Майоров, А. (2006) *Великая Хорватия: Этногенез и ранняя история славян Прикарпатского региона*. Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Санкт-Петербургского университета, 103-104.

² Bilandžić, D. (1999). *Hrvatskamoderna povijest*. Zagreb: GoldenMarketing, 29.

³ Фрейдзон, В. (2001). *История Хорватии*. Санкт-Петербург: Алетейя, 272-273.

⁴ Посольство України в Республіці Хорватія (2019). *Політичні відносини між Україною та Хорватією*. <<http://croatia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-croatia/diplomacy>> (2019, September, 15).

⁵ Фрейдзон, В. (2001) *История Хорватии*. Санкт-Петербург: Алетейя, 279.

Official diplomatic relations between Ukraine and the Republic of Croatia were established on February 18th, 1992 after an exchange of diplomatic notes¹. It's interesting that the first visit of the first Croatian President Franjo Tudjman to Kyiv had place on May 1991 – even before that mutual diplomatic recognition.

But Croatia restored its territorial integrity only in August 1995 after the military operation “Storm”. The last Croatian region occupied by Serbian rebels (Eastern Slavonia) was peacefully reintegrated on January 15th, 1998. Ukrainian soldiers participated there in UNTAES mission (United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia) that was implementing the process of reintegration. Only after that Croatia became able to build democratic society, state of law and to start a process of integration to European Union and NATO.

Ukraine didn't experience any military conflicts in 1990-ies but it suffered from economic problems which were typical for post-communist countries. And Ukraine also, like Croatia, included in globalization and eurointegration processes.

Diplomatic relation between both countries were developing even during first year of their independence, when Croatia was heavily burdened with its war of independence and territorial integrity – so called Croatian Homeland War, 1991-1995.

For example, on January, 26th, 1994 during the first official visit of Ukrainian minister of foreign affairs A. Zlenko to Croatia Protocol of cooperation between both Ministries of foreign affairs and Treaty about visa-free travels of diplomats and officials were signed. Two years later, on September 6-9th, 1996 Croatian minister of foreign affairs M. Granić for the first time visited Ukraine. Parliaments of both countries also established and developed mutual cooperation – in July 1993 the first delegation of Ukrainian parliament (Verhovna Rada) headed by a famous poet and deputy D. Pavlychko visited Croatia. And in January 1999 a special parliament group “Ukraine-Croatia” with a deputy O. Shevchenko as a leader appeared in Kyiv. This group established close friendly relations with Croatian colleagues².

Later similar mutual official visits of politicians and ministers of both countries became much more often. Different meetings of Ukrainian and Croatian officials happened almost every year. But not only high Ukrainian and Croatian politicians have been meeting – cooperation existed and exists also on a local level.

So, on September 26th, 2008 Croatian capital Zagreb was visited by a delegation of Lviv (one of the biggest Ukrainian cities and a popular destination for tourists), which was headed by A. Sadovy (today he's a Mayor of this city). There a big Ukrainian-Croatian business-forum has taken place, during which economic potential and investment opportunities of this city were presented³. And in 2010 direct cooperation was established between different regions and administrative units of Ukraine and Croatia – between Kyiv region and Zagreb county, Chernivtsi region and Varadžin county, Kherson region and Zadar-Knin county, Vinnitsa region and Osijek-Baranja county, Odesa region and Split-Dalmatia county, between cities Drohobych (Ukraine) and Lipik (Croatia)⁴.

Finally, on October 23-25, 2002 during the visit of Ukrainian president L. Kuchma to Croatia the basic political Treaty of friendship and cooperation between Ukraine and the Republic of Croatia was signed. So, on May 9th, 2003 Croatian parliament approved this document and on June 19th, 2003 Ukrainian parliament did the same. Thus, from that moment political, economic and cultural relations between these two countries got a proper legal ground. Today there are 62 different legal documents that regulate Ukrainian-Croatian relationship in various areas⁵.

¹ Угода між Україною і Республікою Хорватія про встановлення дипломатичних відносин, 1992 (Верховна Рада України). Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/ru/191_009> (2019, September, 11).

² Посольство України в Республіці Хорватія (2019). *Договірно-правова база між Україною та Хорватією*. <<http://croatia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-croatia/legal-acts>> (2019, September, 11).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Левченко, О. (2011). Українсько-хорватські відносини – від спільного історичного коріння до сучасності. *Науковий вісник Дипломатичної академії України*, 17 (1), 45-50 <http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Nvdau_2011_17_9> (2019, September, 11).

⁵ Посольство України в Республіці Хорватія (2019). *Договірно-правова база між Україною та Хорватією*. <<http://croatia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-croatia/legal-acts>> (2019, September, 11).

Special attention should be paid to Ukrainian-Croatian cooperation on the way to EU and NATO. So, on May 25th, 2009 Memorandum about cooperation in the field of European integration between Ministries of foreign affairs of Ukraine and Croatia was signed. This document supposed concrete directions of that cooperation for realization of one of the main priorities of both states' foreign policies.

European vector of Ukrainian foreign policy became an absolute priority after the victory of Maidan and so called "Revolution of dignity" in winter 2013-2014 when previous government, president and parliament in Ukraine were changed by strongly pro-Western ones. In 2014-2017 Ukrainian politicians and officials often meet Croatian ones during various international summits, conferences and during special visits¹.

One the most significant events for the development of relationship between Ukraine and Croatia was an official visit of Croatian Prime Minister A. Plenković to Kyiv on November 20-21st, 2016. During this visit A. Plenković said the Croatian experience of peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Barania and Western Sirmia would be very appropriate and useful for Ukraine that had a military conflict with separatists on Donbass, strongly supported by Russian Federation. This message was very warmly met by Ukrainians – both ordinary people and officials².

However, Russia after this Croatian rhetoric condemned it and even blamed Croatia in expelling Serbian civil population from Krjiana in 1995 during the operation "Storm". But, unfortunately, there were not any further practical steps by Ukrainian side in this dimension. Ukrainian government hasn't done any significant steps to analyze, engrain and implement the Croatian experience. On the other hand, frankly speaking, nowadays war on the East of Ukraine isn't the same like Croatian Homeland War (1991-1995). Modern war in Ukraine isn't ethnical (separatism on Donbass is totally political, artificial and created in Moscow, not ethnical or language) and the strength of Yugoslavia in 1991 can't be compared with the strength of Russian Federation today (a state with nuclear weapon).

Generally speaking, Ukrainian-Croatian relations became better and tighter after an annexation of Crimea by Russia and an outbreak of the war on Donbass. Many Ukrainian people (especially politicians, scholars, journalists and officers) have found real similarities between that war and the war in Croatia (1991-1995). As I've mentioned before, these wars aren't the same, but, anyway, Croatian war experience of 1991-1995 and experience of peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia (1995-1998) can be useful for modern Ukraine authorities³.

Also, after tough events of 2014 (the start of the war in Donbas) Ukraine finally chose a way towards NATO. Croatian experience of the way to this alliance became highly topical and practical for Kyiv. On April 1st, 2014 in Brussels, exactly during a meeting of foreign ministers of states-members of NATO, the minister of foreign affairs of Ukraine Andriy Deshchitsia had a conversation with the minister of foreign and European affairs of the Republic of Croatia Vesna Pušić⁴.

But even out of official diplomatic and economic relations, connections and cooperation between socially active people and patriots from both countries have been getting better and better after 2014. Many Ukrainian war orphans and veterans had an opportunity to relax on Croatian sea resorts for free – some Croatian friends of Ukraine provided that opportunity. I'd like to give an example of one Croatian football player – Ivica Pirić, who used to play in Kyiv football team "Arsenal" and to be the head of the Ukrainian chamber of commerce in Croatia⁵. He became very active in this humanitarian help for Ukraine and afforded relax in summer camps on Croatian Adriatic coast for many children from the Eastern Ukraine,

¹ Maxportal (2019). *Ukrajinski analitičar: Ukrajinskohrvatski važni su za sustav sigurnosti u Europi*. <<http://www.maxportal.hr/vijesti/svijet/ukrajinski-analiticar-hrvatsko-ukrajinski-odnosi-vazni-su-za-sustav-sigurnosti-u-europi/>> (2019, September, 16).

² Tportal (2019). *Plenković pojasnio hrvatsku politiku prema Rusiji i Ukrajini*. <<https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/plenkovic-pojasnio-hrvatsku-politiku-prema-rusiji-i-ukrajini-20170619>> (2019, September, 18).

³ Maxportal (2019). *Ukrajinski analitičar: Ukrajinskohrvatski važni su za sustav sigurnosti u Europi*. <<http://www.maxportal.hr/vijesti/svijet/ukrajinski-analiticar-hrvatsko-ukrajinski-odnosi-vazni-su-za-sustav-sigurnosti-u-europi/>> (2019, September, 16).

⁴ Посольство України в Республіці Хорватія (2019). *Політичні відносини між Україною та Хорватією*. <<http://croatia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-croatia/legal-acts>> (2019, September, 15).

⁵ Slobodna Dalmacija (2019). *Nogometas Ivica Pirić na čelu ukrajinske komore u Hrvatskoj*. <<http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/novosti/biznis/clanak/id/310822/nogometas-ivica-piric-na-celu-ukrajinske-komore-u-hrvatskoj>> (2019, September, 19).

who suffered from this war as well as for children of fallen Ukrainian soldiers¹. Today Ivica Pirić is the honorary Consul of Ukraine in the Republic of Croatia. Another example – Croatian volunteers in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (especially in “Azov” regiment). Therefore, during last few years Ukrainians and Croats have been getting closer and friendlier – in various dimensions.

Another fact, directly connected with a bolstering of Ukrainian-Croatian ties, is that from 2017 more and more Ukrainians have been going to Croatia to work. This country in close future could become a new profitable destination for Ukrainian labor emigration. Because at the same time Croats are massively emigrating to Western Europe.

Now let's take some look on some economic questions. Ukraine and Croatia for many years are credible, stable trading and economic partners. Before the world economic crisis of 2009 trade turnover between these countries was increasing by 30-50% every year. For instance, during 2004-2008 the volume of bilateral trade between Ukraine and Croatia increased 3,6 times and was 266 million dollars in 2008. Export and import increased, respectively, 3,4 and 4 times and became 189 and 77 million dollars in 2008. Positive saldo for Ukraine in 2009 increased 3 times and reached 111 million dollars².

During last 17 years some important documents for regulation of economic relations between two countries were signed. On November 23rd, 2005 in Geneva a mutual Protocol on access of goods and services of Ukraine to the markets was signed. It happened during Ukraine's joining the World Trade Organization.

Annual sittings of Intergovernmental Commission on trade and economic cooperation and different business-forums strongly contribute to development of active and profitable mutual Ukrainian-Croatian economic relations. It's very symbolic that on March 26th, 2013, exactly one year before the start of war on Donbass, Ukrainian-Croatian business-forum was held in Donetsk. The same year – in 2013, two other important things for economic cooperation of both countries happened: on September 9th Business Council for Economic Cooperation with Ukraine was established in Zagreb (inside Croatian Chamber of Commerce) and on November 5th Ukrainian-Croatian business council was established and Ukrainian-Croatian business-forum was held in Kyiv.

Such officials like minister of industrial policy of Ukraine M. Korolenko, minister of regional development and EU funds of Croatia B. Grčić, Minister of economy of Croatia I. Vrdoljak took part there. Croatia became even more interesting political and economic partner for Ukraine after 2013, when this ex-Yugoslav republic became a new member of European Union³.

Croatian experience of European integration is really useful for Ukraine, because this Eastern-European country has a precise goal to join EU during the nearest 10-15 years.

And in the end, I'd like to say something about Ukrainian-Croatian cultural cooperation and connections. For sure, both Ukrainians and Croats are Slavic nations so they don't feel any palpable “cultural wall” between. Actually, cultural-humanitarian area has been the most dynamically developing in relations of these countries. Writers and intellectuals of both nations are meeting and exchanging experience quite often. Various art exhibitions, presentations of book, concerts are occurring on a regular basis in Croatian and Ukrainian cities (mostly – in Kyiv, Lviv, Zagreb, Vukovar and Split). Ukrainian language and literature have been taught in University of Zagreb since 1998. A special chair of Ukrainian language and literature was opened there in 2001. Every year 60-70 students are studying here. And Croatian language and literature is also present in Ukraine – in universities in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Lviv.⁴ Last few years more and more Ukrainian students are getting opportunity to study in Zagreb in a course of an exchange program Erasmus+.

¹ Slobodna Dalmacija (2019). *Nogometas Ivica Pirić na čelu ukrajinske komore u Hrvatskoj* <<http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/novosti/biznis/clanak/id/310822/nogometas-ivica-piric-na-celu-ukrajinske-komore-u-hrvatskoj>> (2019, September, 19).

² Посольство України в Республіці Хорватія (2019). *Економічне співробітництво між Україною та Республікою Хорватія* <<http://croatia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-croatia/diplomacy>> (2019, September, 15).

³ Vijesti HRT (2019). *Hrvatsko-ukrajinski gospodarski forum: velik prostor za razvoj suradnje*. <<http://vijesti.hrt.hr/392414/hrvatsko-ukrajinski-gospodarski-forum-velik-prostor-za-razvoj-suradnje>> (2019, September, 21).

⁴ Левченко О. (2011). Українсько-хорватські відносини – від спільного історичного коріння до сучасності. *Науковий вісник Дипломатичної академії України*, 17 (1), 45-50. <http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Nvdau_2011_17_9> (2019, September, 21).

And, hopefully, Croatian policy toward Ukrainian and Ruthenian national minorities is very positive and friendly. According to a census in Croatia of 2011, there were 1800 Ukrainians and 2000 Ruthenians there (generally – 0,1% of population). 90% of them were Greek Catholics (Uniates) and 10% – Catholics.¹

There are many Ukrainian and Ruthenian national organisations in modern Croatia – near 20. Ukrainian diaspora in Croatia publishes different magazines and journals: “Visnyk”, “Nashgazeta”, “Nova dumka”, “Vinochok”, “Dumky z Dunaju”. Ukrainian embassy helps Ukrainians and Ruthenians – in 2010 it gifted them more than 100 Ukrainian books.²

So, it was a short overview of Ukrainian-Croatian relationship since 1991. As we can see, cooperation between both countries has been getting better and better. Ukraine and Croatia do have similarities in their history and culture. Ukrainians and Croats generally have good opinions about each other. Ukraine and Croatia were the first countries to recognize each other in December 1991. The legal basis for official relations in political, economic and cultural dimensions was established in 1990-ies. Being nowadays a member of EU and NATO, Croatia is an interesting and useful example for Ukraine, that also is going to join both organizations. And Croatian military and diplomatic experience from 1991-1998 (especially that one connected with the Euroatlantic integration of Croatia) can be also very useful for Ukrainian politicians. So, a fruitful partnership between Croatia and Ukraine must be useful and reasonable for both countries. There is decent background, good conditions and really interesting prospects for this.

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